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KINGWOOD OBSERVER
SPORTS

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Kingwood falls to nationally ranked Elkins

By JULIAN GUNTHER
Contributing Writer

The Kingwood Mustangs' hopes for a state baseball title came to an abrupt end this past weekend, at the hands of the Knights of Elkins High School, arguably the best team in the nation. Game one saw the Mustangs lose a heartbreaker by a 2-0 score line, and in game two, the Mustangs were defeated by the score of 9-1. Although the season is now over, Kingwood can take pride in establishing two milestones: they participated in the first high school game played at Astros Field, and they are only the second Kingwood team to reach the Region III finals.

The Astros organization presented the ballplayers with a gift of sorts, when they allowed them use of Astros Field for game one, on Thursday night. Kingwood got off to an early start, as senior David Hoke connected with a pitch and was able to advance to second base after a miscue by the Elkins' defense. Senior Michael Flower was walked to first base; however, Elkins' major league prospect, James Loney, was able to retire the side before damage was done. Loney would have a phenomenal game, allowing Kingwood only one hit during his seven innings on the mound.

Senior Lance Pendleton was equally impressive, as he allowed only two runs over the course of the game, unfortunately, those would be all that was needed to propel Elkins to victory. Pendleton held the top of the Knights' batting order in check, until the third inning. Elkins' batter Spencer Jackson connected with one of Pendleton's fastballs, and sent it 360 feet over the centerfield wall, for

a two-run home run, and a 2-0 lead.

Pendleton led a late sixth inning rally by the Mustangs, when he was walked after five pitches. Senior David Hoke, then capitalized, when he latched on to one of Loney's pitches, and sent it to left field, allowing Pendleton to advance to second, while he was safe at first. Senior J.B. Sowyrda was then walked, thus loading the bases, with only one out. Unfortunately for the Mustangs, Loney regained his composure, and collected senior Michael Flower's hit for a double play to end the inning.

The Knights threatened to increase the lead yet again, but Pendleton was able to alleviate the danger, and hold them scoreless; however, his Elkins' counterpart, Loney, was also up to the task, and so the score remained 2-0 in Elkins' favor.

Game two was played the following evening, in the confines of the Reliant Astrodome, this game proved to be more of an offensive showcase, as the teams scored a combined 10 runs.

Kingwood proved that they would not be go down without a fight, as they scored in the top of the first inning. Pendleton and Hoke both scored singles to open the contest, and then pulled off the impressive double base steal, to quickly place two Mustangs in scoring position. Flower was then hit in the arm with an errant pitch to quickly complicate matters for Elkins, as they faced a bases loaded situation with no outs. Senior Ryan McQuarrie then followed with a squeeze attempt, and although unsuccessful, Pendleton was somehow able to get under the tag at home plate, to establish an early 1-0 lead. Elkins' pitcher Wardell



Kingwood Coach David Denney discusses strategy with his team during Thursday night's game against Elkins. The Mustangs fell to the nationally known Knights in a hard fought series. Photo by Matthew Normand

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Starling held the Mustangs in check, and the Knights closed the inning, when Hoke was picked off at home, and Starling struck out the next batter.

Junior Michael Hopper was given the call on the mound, and helped the Kingwood cause, by hold the Knights scoreless in the bottom of the first to give Kingwood a 1-0 lead, after one.

The Knights responded; however, in the bottom of the second, when they were able to score four runs off of five hits, to establish a

three point lead, with the score at 4-1. Starling then proved why he is considered one of the top youth prospects in the nation, as he wouldn't allow another Kingwood hit, until the top of the fourth inning, but it would only be a single.

Elkins, on the other hand, would score again in the fifth and sixth innings, to secure their 9-1 lead.

Starling continued his impressive pitching display, striking out several Mustangs' batters, and allowing only three hits during the contest.

Kingwood finishes the season with a 29-10 regular and postseason record, and look forward to next year with the return of many lettermen, and a team core of several all-district players.